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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/21/2019

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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S GOVERNMENT DISTANCES ITSELF FROM FATAH
MEMBER QADDUMI'S ACCUSATIONS

REF: JERUSALEM 1223

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Jordan's government is attempting to distance itself from the controversy surrounding inflammatory statements issued in Amman by Fatah Central Committee Member Faruq Qaddumi about the circumstances of Yasser Arafat's death. Qaddumi was reportedly asked by Jordan's government not to make further political statements, but the rumors about his possible deportation seem to be false. Opinion on Qaddumi's statements is mostly dismissive, although some see them as a notice to the Palestinian leadership that his faction must be taken seriously. Jordan's government will continue to distance itself from Palestinian internal politics as the Fatah 6th Party Congress draws near. End Summary.

Qaddumi's Accusations Make Waves

¶2. (C) On July 12, Fatah Central Committee member Faruq Qaddumi lashed out at Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas during a press conference in Amman, accusing Abbas of masterminding a plot to kill former PA President Yasser Arafat with Israeli cooperation. Government spokesman Nabil Al-Sharif denied any Jordanian government influence on Qaddumi's remarks in a July 13 press conference. Opposition daily Al-Dustour claimed on July 17 that the Jordanian government asked Qaddumi to refrain from further political statements from Jordanian soil. An MFA contact told poloff that Jordan's government "knew Qaddumi's statements were in the pipeline," but refrained from taking action to stop them. Jordanian authorities subsequently denied reports that they had asked Qaddumi to leave the country. The Al-Ghad newspaper, cited a "high-level source" who said that Qaddumi "is welcome at any time, but cannot make political statements. In the event that he does not abide by this, the matter will be dealt with accordingly."

Jordanian Opinion Divided

¶3. (C) Reaction among our contacts to Qaddumi's statements varies greatly. Most interlocutors dismiss Qaddumi as an aging scion of a nearly defunct Palestinian faction and see his remarks as a feeble attempt to prove his relevance. Contacts believe that Qaddumi will ultimately be outflanked politically by Abbas and the PA leadership. They point out that even among Jordan's large Palestinian population, Qaddumi enjoys few supporters and is considered a relic of times gone by.

¶4. (C) Other opinion leaders are not so quick to discount Qaddumi's statements, however. Influential conservative political columnist Fahed Al-Khitin questioned the government's automatic rejection of Qaddumi's allegations, noting that "Abbas's authority is suffering from obvious weakness...Jordan's interest lies in restoring Palestinian

national unity and not in playing the role of Abbas's defense attorney against Qaddoumi's accusations." Columnist Oraib Rantawi (who is reportedly close to Qaddumi's faction) called for Qaddumi's allegations to be investigated further (reftel).

Comment

¶ 5. (S) Jordan's government is keeping a low profile when it comes to internal Palestinian political dynamics, especially leading up to the Fatah 6th Party Congress. While elite opinion may be divided on Qaddumi and his influence, Jordan's government will likely continue to distance itself from him and any other statements made from Jordan on Palestinian politics.

Beecroft